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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet examines instructional improvement process in postsecondary education. It first discusses the importance of teaching, revealing that too little sustained attention to the process of teaching is a major deterrent to its improvement, and explains why teaching evaluation has been largely abandoned as the sole improvement mechanism. Then, it describes the development of the instructional improvement process in the Department of Special Services Education at the University of Tennessee (Knoxville), including the creation and efforts of an improvement committee, the adoption of an improvement model, and the final development and faculty acceptance of an improvement plan. Next, the process is discussed from two perspectives: (1) from the viewpoint of a faculty member as a member of the Instructional Improvement Committee; and (2) from the viewpoint of a faculty member who participated in the process. The pamphlet concludes with discussions on what was learned and some suggestions for other departments considering a similar process. (GLR)

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Teaching-Learning Issues

Initiating Instructional Improvement: A Chronicle of Faculty Development

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This number of TEACHING/LEARNING ISSUES has been prepared by Laurence J. Coleman, professor and head; Tricia McClam, associate professor; and Jean Schindler, professor, Special Services Education at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

You can not teach a man anything; you can only help him to find it within himself.

Galileo

Learning Research Center
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Professors fill a variety of roles. Given the practical limits of both time and energy, professors have to make decisions about allocating their activities. One constant in a professor's life is teaching. Almost all professorial appointments include some teaching. All professors regularly have to make decisions about the content and quality of their teaching while balancing the responsibilities of research and service. Some find this balancing act to be rather easy; most find it presents a dilemma in which they must continuously try to set their priorities.

Factors Affecting the Perceived Importance of Teaching

Teaching can be promoted or ignored on a campus. Several factors promote good teaching. The most obvious and least formal is the example provided by professors who care deeply about their teaching and strive to improve it. For these persons the opportunity to be good teachers has always been present because they have created it. Institutional circumstances probably have minimal effect on them. Important informal support for good teaching occurs when value is placed on it. Universities, like any culture, promote or discourage activities by the attitudes that the culture holds towards that activity. In departments and colleges where teaching is valued, good teaching is practiced more frequently than in less supportive environments. When colleagues expect it of each other and of themselves, good teaching happens.

In addition to informal support in a university setting, there are more formal forces working to foster teaching. At UTK the joint Senate-Provost committee on support for and evaluation of instruction has clearly indicated that teaching is valued. Furthermore, the Learning Research Center stands as a symbol of the University's commitment to teaching excellence. The annual alumni awards are also evidence that good teaching is considered worthy of recognition.

Other factors certainly work against instructional improvement.

Most faculty may find these easier to enumerate than the positive factors. Disincentives to the improvement of teaching are generally subtle, but nevertheless persistent, messages present in the university atmosphere. These include

1. the invisibility of discourse on good teaching in the course of ordinary conversation among faculty;

2. the lack of affirmation to new professors of the ethical imperative to be a good teacher;

3. a perceived lack of clarity on the criteria for good teaching;

4. absence of clear results in the continual dialogue for improvement;

5. the demands on a professor's time and energy in working at being a good teacher;

6. a perception that decisions of promotion and tenure are largely unaffected by ratings of teaching proficiency.

All these messages point to the one clear deterrent to the improvement of teaching: *the lack of sustained individual and collective attention.*

Improvement or Evaluation

In the Department of Special Services Education, the faculty decided not to review and renew the arguments that can take place around the merits or lack of merits of these points. Instead they decided to try to improve instruction. In short, they opted to reduce some of the problems by admitting that they could improve teaching without rehashing all the reasons why it would be difficult, if not impossible, to do so.

Why instructional *improvement* instead of *evaluation*? The reader may have noticed by this time that we have avoided the term evaluation. This is no accident. As the faculty discussed how they might recognize and reward good teaching, they came to realize that evaluation was not what they wanted to do. They wanted to make their teaching better. They did not want to get into an argument about what was the magical point when ordinary teaching becomes extraordinary teaching. Instead they wanted to devote their energies to improving what they did as teachers. The goal was to improve, not simply to monitor, a professor's performance in the classroom.

They also shied away from evaluation because they held certain beliefs about teaching and because they had, as a group, considerable experience trying to evaluate teaching. They believe that good teaching is not a fixed or steady state; rather, they see good teaching as a continual process of restructuring. A professor may choose to leave a

course alone for a while or turn his/her attention to another course, but teaching a course is never finished. Knowledge, students, and professors change, so the process of good teaching is never complete.

A final factor that worked in favor of their abandoning the concept of evaluation was that many had themselves evaluated both beginning student teachers and experienced public school teachers/counselors. They did not wish to repeat or relive those experiences. They saw themselves as experienced faculty who wanted assistance in improving their teaching, not as novices who had nascent ideas of college teaching.

In summary, they were not primarily concerned with evaluation. Although they recognized evaluation as part of instructional improvement, they saw evaluation techniques only as tools for helping get the information needed to improve teaching.

DEVELOPING A PROCESS

The Department Head's Perspective

A prime impetus for the move to try to improve instruction was the appointment of a new department head. He wanted to help the faculty develop an agenda for the future and to do something that would help the department feel good about itself. Because he thought it inappropriate in a collegial relationship to force faculty in a direction in which they had no interest, he interviewed them concerning their values and ambitions for themselves and the department and learned that they valued teaching and believed themselves to be committed to being good teachers. The head saw this expressed interest in teaching as an opportunity to involve the faculty in something they cared about; he also thought the situation had the potential for awakening some dormant research interests.

In order to get things moving, he recognized that something more than lip service, i.e., "we value teaching," was necessary. The faculty needed to create an environment that would encourage people to talk about their teaching. He assumed that continuous attention to a topic is a sign of its status and that they would tend to move in the direction of a highly visible standard of behavior. He decided to present some of these ideas to them and see what would happen.

The following quotation presents the department head's perspective; he was not a neutral observer of the process:

> I had a vision of where I wanted the department to go, but I did not share this with the faculty for several reasons. First, I did not wish to influence the process or the faculty. For the faculty to have ownership it must be their ideas. Second, I felt that perhaps my ideal might be too radical for the faculty to consider. What I envisioned was a department in which the faculty accepted as one of their responsibilities the betterment of

teaching. As such they would exchange ideas about teaching and would willingly invite each other into their classes in a continuous process of trying to help one another get better. I also hoped that discussions about good teaching would become so commonplace that faculty would voluntarily share with me accounts of their teaching.

This idea of instructional improvement was presented to the faculty based on the proposition that one responsibility of a community of scholars is to transmit information and new learnings. One vehicle for this is teaching. Because the faculty share the belief that teaching is important, it makes sense that sustained attention should be focused in this area.

The faculty liked the idea, and a committee was formed. Each of the four administrative areas in the department nominated someone who had a commitment to teaching to be on the committee. Faculty were also asked to volunteer to serve on the committee. The head appointed the chair from among this group. He picked the person he knew to be most committed to the idea of improving teaching within the department, reasoning that this person would be able to persevere and hurdle the inertia that tends to develop when a group realizes how difficult a task is. The committee met, and their charge was reviewed. The essential problem for the committee was to find a way to evaluate instruction that would lead to the improvement of instruction. The head did not attend the regular meetings. The committee members had their own ideas on the topic.

Getting Started: Formulating Questions

As the committee struggled to begin what appeared to be a monumental task, they discovered that they had some basic questions and concerns about possible evaluation components as well as the kind of process they would like to present to the faculty. It was immediately obvious that all members of the committee had taken very seriously the charge by the department head to formulate a process whereby the faculty could improve instruction. There was agreement that instruction was valued and that it was a primary responsibility of the faculty members in this department. They found themselves asking four kinds of questions as they considered the charge. The reader should note that the term evaluation appears repeatedly. Its use demonstrates that the committee had not yet recognized that improvement, not evaluation, was the key to the process.

1. Do different courses need to be evaluated differently? This department, like others, is very diverse, serving both undergraduates and graduates in very different areas of study. Should introductory sections be evaluated in the same way as methods courses? Will

student evaluations to include other measures from a variety of sources.

2. A good process is *flexible*. It consists of a variety of components, some of which are mandatory and some voluntary. Flexibility allows faculty members to tailor the process to meet their individual objectives.

3. A good process is *supportive* and relatively *non-threatening* to faculty members. The emphasis must remain on *assessment for the improvement of instruction*.

In conclusion, the committee was committed to the idea of *multidimensionality* because it reflected their beliefs about assessment for improving instruction. The most effective process for a diverse department would be one that incorporates a variety of components and sources of information.

Adapting a Model. The Director of the Learning Research Center brought to the faculty's attention a model from the University of Oklahoma (1984). Reflecting the importance of multidimensionality, this model suggests that the nature of evaluation calls for the examination of four dimensions of instruction: input, process, product, and context. The instructor's knowledge of the subject matter and ability to communicate that knowledge to students is input. The process or implementation dimension consists of the syllabus, textbooks, course objectives, tests, and classroom behavior. Student learning as indicated by grades and student feedback is the product. Factors such as the time of class, the setting, required versus elective status, and the institutional climate make up the context along with personal factors including the non-professional life of the instructor and the effects an illness, a divorce, or some other problem might have on the instructor's performance.

There are a variety of sources of information for each of the four dimensions and a source may be used for more than one dimension. For example, possible sources of information are students (both present and alumni), peers, the department head, consultants, and the instructor him or herself. Suppose the instructor's knowledge of the subject matter is a focus of assessment. Sources of information might include the instructor's activities and comments and observations by peers. If the process dimension (i.e., quality of lectures) is also a concern, then the same sources may be supplemented by information from students. The weight that sources have in each dimension may vary. In the first instance, peers are a primary source. In the second, they may be a secondary source.

evaluation methods for undergraduate courses be appropriate for graduate courses and seminars? And what about field experiences, practica, and internships?

2. In addition to student evaluations, what are some other ways of evaluating instruction? The committee felt that most faculty probably did solicit student input regarding their courses; however, there were questions about how helpful that information was. The committee felt strongly that student evaluations do not provide a global picture of the instructional process. This led them to the next question.

3. What do other departments and colleges on campus do? Had others examined instructional evaluation and developed a process that they might share with the committee?

4. Finally, how are teaching evaluations best used? This was a question that they felt had to be explored thoroughly if the idea of instructional evaluation was to gain the support and the participation of the faculty and lead to improvement. In what ways could evaluations be used and incorporated into this process?

At this point something interesting happened within the committee. They suddenly began thinking in personal terms—"our process." The idea took hold that they could develop a process that would be specific to their department and one that was exactly what they believed to be the best for them. It was not important to copy a process already in place or to present one that was acceptable to the department head. Rather, the development of a process for instructional improvement based on the assessment of instruction *as faculty chose to measure it* was agreed upon by the committee as its task.

How to Proceed?

Further discussion, which was enthusiastic and thoughtful based on the feelings of ownership that had developed, led them to identify resources and ideas that they wished to investigate. The resources available at the Learning Research Center on campus included written materials and consultants. Other departments and colleges that have implemented the same sort of process were identified and information was requested from them. While tapping these resources, the committee continued its dialogue regarding its own procedures. Faculty response was important, they agreed, and should be both formal and informal as well as formative and summative.

The committee also discussed its vision of a good process, agreeing on the importance of the following points:

1. A good process includes *multiple measures*; that is, it goes beyond

The Proposal

The committee felt that this model met its criteria, allowing inclusion of multiple measures and flexibility. As the committee set about adapting this model, it was guided by the third criterion for a good process, one that is supportive and nonthreatening to the faculty member. The committee established a time line with two goals. By the end of winter quarter (three months away), the committee would seek agreement from the faculty on a set of philosophical statements concerning instructional improvement. By the end of spring quarter (another three months), they would present a process to the faculty for approval. During this six-month period, the committee would seek both formal and informal responses from the faculty. They would also meet with faculty from other departments and consultants from the Learning Research Center.

After considerable discussion among the committee members, the following statements were presented to the faculty in writing for their reactions prior to the winter quarter faculty meeting. These statements were affirmed and supported unanimously by the faculty:

1. Excellence in teaching is one of the primary goals of the department. Teaching excellence is expected of all faculty and is recognized as one of the factors considered in the promotional and merit raise process.

2. Each faculty member is expected to strive to improve his/her teaching expertise.

3. Teaching by graduate teaching assistants is under the supervision of a faculty member who helps the student to improve teaching effectiveness.

4. The department recognizes that there are many effective styles of teaching; these vary with the individual, subject matter and level, and students.

5. The department head conducts evaluations annually for the purposes of improving teaching and making personnel decisions.

6. Every student should have the opportunity to evaluate each course he/she takes in the department.

7. Student evaluation is necessary but not sufficient for the improvement of instruction.

The second part of the task, to develop a process, was more complex. The committee began by identifying possible assessment methods which were submitted to the faculty for their reactions. Primarily, faculty were asked to indicate which methods they felt should be voluntary and which should be mandatory. Table 1 reveals that

Table 1: Faculty Survey Results

	Mandatory	Optional
Review of instructional materials related to course content (syllabi, reading lists, texts, etc.)	11	4
Methods and results of student evaluation (grade distribution, exams, etc.)	11	5
Student evaluations of instructor on a standard departmental form	13	3
Supplemental evaluation of instructor on forms prepared by individual faculty member	3	12
Videotaping: for personal review	4	11
for peer review	1	12
for outside review	1	11
Interview of students by an evaluation committee member or someone else	6	9
Comments from colleague who has observed your teaching	2	12
Course evaluations by graduates	7	8
Mail-out course evaluation forms	6	7
Telephone interview of graduates	0	11
Definition of your model of effective teaching	3	10
Preparation of a Written Individualized Teaching Improvement Plan (WITIP)	5	6

n=16

faculty were very supportive of mandatory reviews of written materials—including departmental student evaluations, exams, syllabi, and texts. They were less supportive of requiring methods that involved observations, videotaping, and supplemental evaluation forms. Faculty were also asked the following three questions:

1. How often are you willing to prepare and submit materials?
2. Would you be willing to serve on a committee which evaluates instruction?
3. Would you be willing to serve in 1987-88?

With this information, the committee designed a process. What was actually proposed and what was approved by the faculty at the end of spring quarter were very similar; however, the faculty's discussion of the proposal was enlightening and seemed to focus on three areas of concern. The first was procedural and included questions such as how often a faculty member would participate in this process and what materials would be submitted. The idea of evaluation was a second area of concern and seemed to contain an element of fear about who would get the results and what effects they would have on an individual's yearly evaluation by the department head. Some individuals were interpreting the process as a move toward evaluation as a policing mechanism on the part of their colleagues as well as the department head. A third concern was time; that is, faculty were quite emphatic that they did not want to spend a great deal of time preparing materials for assessment and that a burdensome, structured process would not be endorsed.

It was up to committee members at this point to emphasize certain aspects of the process in order to allay these concerns. They reiterated that there are two perspectives on the uses of assessment and that for the purposes of this department, improving instruction was the only objective. This would not, however, prevent individual faculty members from sharing their feedback with colleagues or the department head should they *choose* to do so. In fact, several at the associate level thought it would be quite useful information as they prepared for promotion. What the committee tried to communicate was that the process was in the hands of the individual faculty member not only in terms of what use was made of the results but also what components were to be assessed and what sources of information tapped.

Following this discussion the faculty voted that the process be mandatory for all faculty and that it be implemented a minimum of once in a three-year cycle beginning with the next academic year.

The following guidelines now in effect describe the process:

Table 2: Instructional Probe

COURSE NUMBER_____
QUARTER _____
TIME_____
INSTRUCTOR_____

DIRECTIONS: Mark the column labeled NA when an item is not applicable.
P = Poor, F = Fair, G = Good, E = Excellent

COURSE EVALUATION

	P	F	G	E	NA
1. The instructor's knowledge of course content	—	—	—	—	—
2. Clarity of instructor's presentations	—	—	—	—	—
3. How stimulating were the instructor's presentations	—	—	—	—	—
4. Encouragement of questions and discussion	—	—	—	—	—
5. Relevance of assigned readings to course objectives	—	—	—	—	—
6. Relevance of textbook to course content	—	—	—	—	—
7. Relevance of lectures to course objectives	—	—	—	—	—
8. Clarity of course objectives and assignments	—	—	—	—	—
9. Fairness of grading	—	—	—	—	—
10. Availability for extra help	—	—	—	—	—
11. Overall rating of instruction	—	—	—	—	—

EVALUATION OF FIELD EXPERIENCE

1. Orientation to placement site and programprior to beginning the field experience	—	—	—	—	—
2. Supervision and support from faculty supervisor	—	—	—	—	—
3. Supervision and support from field supervisor	—	—	—	—	—
4. Value of performance evaluation and feedback	—	—	—	—	—

1. The primary purpose of evaluation of instruction is the improvement of teaching.

2. A departmental evaluation committee will be appointed each year. Duties are (a) coordinating the evaluation process, (b) tabulating and recording the standard departmental evaluation probe, and (c) providing feedback to faculty regarding a summary of the probe.

3. Each person being evaluated will select three individuals of same or higher rank to serve on his/her evaluation committee. One person will be appointed chairperson to coordinate the evaluation process for that individual. A summary report will be shared with the individual as well as with the departmental evaluation committee.

4. The following materials will be included in all evaluations:

   a. Instructional materials related to course content (syllabi, reading lists, texts, etc.)

   b. Methods and results of the instructor's evaluation of student performance (grade distribution, exams, etc.)

   c. Student evaluations of instruction on a standardized departmental form (See Table 2) [The instrument will function as a probe and, after administration, should be given to a departmental evaluation committee member for tabulation. Additional forms or items may be added by individual instructors who will receive this information directly.]

5. Other methods of evaluation may be included (videotapes, observations, etc.).

THE PROCESS IN ACTION

The first year six faculty members participated in the instructional improvement process and, as expected, their objectives were quite different. For example, one faculty member asked that instruction in a specific course be studied while another was interested in feedback regarding teaching style. A variety of strategies were identified and utilized based on the differing objectives. Participants selected their own committee members. In order to facilitate the reader's understanding of what actually happened, two perspectives will be presented. One is a faculty member's experience as a member of the Instructional Improvement Committee, and the other is that of a faculty member who participated in the process.

A Committee Member's Perspective

As the committee that developed the process presented the guidelines to the faculty, my thoughts began racing. I had two concerns. The

first was that I disliked the name of the process. Evaluation was a far more limiting concept than instructional improvement. The second major thought was how my years of experience as a supervisor could be used in the implementation of the process. With these two concerns in mind, I volunteered to be a committee member.

The new committee met for the first time after fall term had begun. By then three people had requested help from the committee. We discussed the requests and the title of our committee. It was determined both needed more thought.

During the discussion of the requests for help, I shared the process of supervisory observations and my willingness to do them. As a supervisor of student teachers, I had used the procedures for many years. The committee was in agreement that my role would be to conduct observations for those professors who wanted to be observed. One person had requested an observation. When I talked with other faculty requesting help or evaluation, two more decided to be observed.

Peer Observation. I did clinical observations with three faculty members who requested the services of the Instructional Improvement Committee. The format included a pre-observation conference, the actual observation, and a post-observation conference.

The pre-observation conference is of extreme importance. It is here that the participant describes the instructional situation and prepares the observer for the observation. At this stage a questionnaire is useful to focus the discussion on instructional goals, activities, methods, and materials. The potential for alternative processes or activities also exists, and these can be explored further by the observer and the observee. Perhaps of greatest importance is that the observees establish the distinct parameters of the feedback they are willing to receive. The importance of the observer clearly noting these parameters cannot be emphasized too strongly. Feedback is valuable only if it is given in a manner which meets the following criteria: 1) non-judgmental, 2) precisely what was asked for in the pre-observation conference, 3) not evaluative in nature, and 4) not interpretive.

If one observes that the instructor is talking more to one side of the room than another, it is better to do a frequency count of interactions than to say "You spent more time on the left than the right side of the room." If the professor hasn't a goal which suggests the amount of time students are attending to instruction be considered, then such feedback must be given very carefully and in a manner which is almost an aside. Otherwise, it shouldn't be shared at all.

During the observation the observer should sit where the instructor can be carefully watched. It is better if students are told why there is an intruder in the class. During the observation period a

behavioral narrative is written. Drawing movement patterns, monitoring the frequency of interactions, and noting negative-neutral-positive response patterns are also quite helpful.

It is best if the behavioral narrative and other notations are done with carbon paper, providing at least two copies. Also one needs to be sensitive to how much feedback can be tolerated or absorbed by any individual. More than one or two areas for improvement is probably excessive. Sensitive people who put themselves in a risk-taking position by requesting this process are very vulnerable. Inundating them with too much feedback will very likely cause them to withdraw from the process. The rule that one should alternate positive with negative comments in a sandwich approach is useful here. Until one is very experienced in this process, the danger of overkill is always present. Too many pages of feedback is also a form of overkill. One or two pages is more than sufficient for an individual session. In fact the amount of written feedback may be more important than the amount of time spent in observing. This is not to say that an adequate observation is only five minutes long. Usually twenty to thirty minutes of direct observation is sufficient.

The post-observation conference requires tact and sensitivity and is best held immediately after the observation. Feedback should be in writing. The original copy as written during the observation is preferable. This can be a very illuminating experience for the instructor who is frequently surprised by his/her strengths. Since the instructor sets the goals for the observation, he/she is seldom surprised or upset by the weaknesses. Most ask, "Was there anything else?"

One way to deal with that in a manner which will be well received is to ask, "What do you feel I should have noticed?" Again, the instructor is establishing what he/she is willing to hear. If something relevant was observed, share it. If not, say, "I didn't notice that, but I wasn't looking for it. Perhaps I could come back and look for it another time."

When possible, it is wise to give suggestions for solutions or suggest where to find a solution; however, be sensitive to the person and his/her ability to receive such information.

I followed this procedure with each of the three instructors who were observed. All three reported that clinical observation was of some value and responded very positively to the feedback from their observations. I learned that the model of clinical observation I used was easily adjusted to be a valuable tool to improve instruction at the postsecondary level, that my skills were more important to the faculty who were observed than I had believed them to be, and that I needed to be very careful not to assume that everyone who made a request for help from the committee would be in need/want of observation.

A Faculty Member's Perspective

I chose to participate in the instructional improvement process for several reasons. First, I was concerned about my instruction in a specific course. I had taught this course for a number of years and received mixed reviews from students. While there is agreement that it is a demanding course in terms of requirements and that the subject (research and statistics) is not a favorite among majors, there was some concern in my mind about my instruction of the course. Second, this was the last time the course would be taught on the quarter system so it was appropriate to receive feedback before revising it for the semester system. Third, I will prepare materials for promotion within the next three years, and it seemed a good idea for those faculty members on the committee to be aware of my performance in the classroom.

I notified the committee of my intention to participate and suggested that they serve as my review committee. The members of the committee were all full professors, and I perceived them all as knowledgeable about teaching. I also asked to have an assistant professor who had some expertise in the content area of this particular course included on the committee.

In accordance with the guidelines, I submitted the following materials: a syllabus, student evaluations, grade distributions from two previous quarters, and a collection of handouts used in the course. Copies of texts and examinations were also available should anyone on the committee wish to review them. I indicated my intention to administer the departmental probe at the end of the quarter. I reiterated my offer to meet with the committee for further discussion.

The materials I provided gave them information with which to evaluate the course design, objectives, activities, and assignments, meeting one of my objectives. Concerning a second objective, that of instructional improvement, the committee suggested that observation of a class might provide information about my performance as well as the course environment. I agreed, although I must admit I was a little apprehensive about the classroom observation. My past experiences with this had been for the purpose of evaluating job performance, were tied to salary increases, and had been conducted by someone whose teaching style was very different from mine.

After submitting my materials, I was told that someone would observe my class on either one of two dates, heightening my anxiety. To my surprise I received a call from the person who would do the observation suggesting that we find a time to talk about what we wanted to happen during the observation. First, she suggested that I complete a brief form detailing my expectations and, second, that we discuss my ideas. The form asked for information about my objectives

for that particular class meeting, the activities planned to achieve those objectives, and what I specifically wished her to observe. When we met, our discussion focused on clarifying what I had written. "Have you thought about...?" or "You may be interested in...." prefaced additional suggestions, giving me control over what was to happen. She emphasized that the results would be given only to me. This certainly validated the process for me, and for the first time I actually felt that this might be a valuable exercise and that I might learn something useful about my instruction.

The observer was present in class on the date we selected. Immediately following the class, she provided both written and verbal feedback which covered a number of areas including physical movement, usage patterns of certain words or phrases, and clarity and style of the presentation. The manner in which this was done was very supportive and nonthreatening. It also focused on what I had requested and was based on observable behavior. For example, it became evident very quickly that I have an "okay" pattern. In a three-minute period, I had used "okay" 24 times to punctuate sentences of transition and to reinforce the message.

In conclusion, it was worthwhile for me to participate in the instructional improvement process. The parts which I found extremely helpful were the classroom observation and the participation of a faculty member who was knowledgeable in the content area. These two individuals were able to provide feedback and suggestions in several areas including teaching style, texts, and handouts.

REFLECTIONS

The faculty of the Department of Special Services Education feel that their efforts to improve instruction have taught them much about themselves and about the process itself. We conclude with what has been learned and offer some suggestions for other departments considering a similar process.

Problems

Several problems emerged quite early in the process. When the 1987-88 academic year began, the faculty jumped into the process. Six faculty members requested help to improve their teaching. Questions about procedures and issues were raised that were addressed appropriately and inappropriately. These problems are summarized below.

Natural chaos and confusion. The beginning of any new endeavor results in some confusion. Old patterns are of limited usefulness, and new patterns have yet to be established. Much of the confusion was exaggerated because, in the hurry to get started, most of the faculty did not bother to read carefully the policy/guidelines they had voted

on. As a consequence, procedures were not followed and expectations were unrealistic. A contributing factor was that not all parties were certain what they personally wanted from the process. Most had no trouble voicing how the process could be beneficial in general, but in reference to an individual, it was another matter. A final source of confusion was logistical. Time lines were unclear and scheduling meetings among the parties was cumbersome. Most of these problems were ironed out as the year progressed. One year after the process was approved, the faculty evaluated it. The process was seen to be working, but several modifications were made. These are noted in the section on suggestions.

Making the procedure more acceptable to the faculty. While the faculty had approved the procedure and some of them had rushed to get involved, others were expressing uneasiness. It seemed that some faculty had difficulty believing that the goal was improvement, not evaluation, and they also had difficulty with the idea that the experience could be made personally useful.

The committee coordinating the procedure and the department head recognized the problem. Together they decided to review the process at the late fall departmental faculty meeting. One of the committee members suggested that she and a faculty member who had used peer observation role-play the post-observation conference during the meeting. They did this, and then the other faculty who had participated in the process were invited to make comments. Their comments were very enthusiastic as they described how the peer observation helped them. When the meeting ended, more faculty recognized that they could use the process to address their concerns about improving their teaching and understood that the information was not going to the department head.

Suggestions

We offer some suggestions to assist other departments that want to develop an instructional improvement process of their own.

1. The intent of the process is the improvement of teaching. The process belongs to the faculty. Because it is nonevaluative, there is no need for the information to be made available to the department head. In essence, a mechanism is created for faculty to get feedback about aspects of their teaching which concern them. The faculty member establishes his or her agenda for improvement.

2. Start with volunteers who place a high priority on improving instruction. It makes little sense to start with faculty who have no interest or desire to improve some aspect of their teaching. Furthermore, the interest of volunteers can help to overcome logistical problems.

3. The process should be flexible so that different courses, different teaching styles, and different goals can be accommodated. Improving one's teaching assumes that professors are most likely to make constructive changes in their teaching when they are trying to reach a personal image of good teaching. Note that in this system one professor might settle for a standard that differs from that of his or her colleagues.

4. The departmental committee that oversees the process should be chaired by a person who values teaching. The professor asking for assistance in improving his or her teaching should be able to select the persons to assist in the process. The departmental committee should simply coordinate the overall process.

5. A department should develop or use the same standard type of instrument to gather data on every course taught in the department. This will enable professors to have a baseline for judging major deviations in their teaching as seen by students.

6. Devote some of the time in faculty meetings to faculty who are willing to share their experience in instructional improvement. The procedures developed by the department should be reviewed periodically. Attention to teaching is one sign of its importance.

7. Departments are urged to use the peer observation process described in some detail in this paper. The process needs to be timely so that feedback is provided within 24 hours of an observation. The interaction between colleagues about a class in which one observed and the other taught is an exciting and useful experience for both.

In conclusion, the faculty of Special Services Education has begun a systematic way of improving instruction. We believe we are successful because we find ourselves spending more time discussing teaching. At this point only about one-fifth of the faculty have been involved in the complete process. We will learn more about the process and ourselves in the next year as we continue. If someone wishes more direct comments about these efforts, we would be pleased to discuss them.

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